

# Christ, the Peacemaker

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## Chapter 1

### Real People In A Real Town

#### Col. 1:1-2; 4:7-18

In the first two verses of Colossians we are told who wrote the epistle and to whom it was written. We should note that both the writer and the persons to whom it was written are indicated as belonging to God in a special way.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother" (Colossians 1:1).

Any idea that Paul would express would not be his own ideas, which he had developed in the course of his heritage or his educational background. These ideas are not derived from his cultural heritage, nor did he learn them primarily from Gamaliel. He is going to write what Jesus Christ would authorize him to write, and for this he would be responsible to God.

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae . . . (Colossians 1:2).

This is critically important! Let me emphasize that Paul was not teaching principles of social behavior to the world at large to show them how to achieve peace among men! We need to keep in mind that when Paul writes "you" he means born-again, Spirit indwelt, children of God! "Saints and faithful brethren in Christ." It is to be feared that the common impression can be gained from much pulpit preaching that the promises of the grace of God found in the epistles of the New Testament are intended for this whole congregation present in the service, simply because the preacher of the day has not been careful to note that such promises were addressed to the "saints." Certainly the Gospel is for everybody, but all in due order! We must observe "first things first." "Ye must be born again."

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (I Corinthians 2:14).

It is to these persons who are spiritual that Paul writes:

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:2).

These are the persons who can receive the peace which Christ Jesus brings.

Our Bible study is then directed to note the closing verses in the epistle in which mention is made of some "Real People in a Real Town" (Col. 4:7-18). As each of these is listed Paul makes comment about the service rendered, or the function performed, in the fellowship of the believers. Each of these is a "saint" and would be rated as one of the "faithful brethren in Christ," but each is mentioned because of some personal service to Paul or to the church which he/she performed in their fellowship. In this way we see them as "real people" in a real "personal situation."

Paul is counting on Tychicus to inform the saints at Colossae about Paul's affairs. He would be telling

them of Paul's health and his activity as well as his experiences in the world outside. Tychicus evidently was a kind compassionate fellow believer among the other believers in Rome, where he was rated "a beloved brother"; and he was also "a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord." In this way Paul referred to his spiritual state. Tychicus was faithful in his preaching to the truth of the Gospel. "All have sinned . . ." and are doomed to destruction: Christ Jesus came "to seek and to save the lost." "He gave His life a ransom for many." "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish." "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son shall be condemned, and the wrath of God abideth on him." Regardless of who was involved, Tychicus would insist "Ye must be born again," Such preaching would arouse opposition and excite persecution; but Tychicus would persist and endure as a faithful "fellow servant in the Lord." Paul was in prison for preaching this Gospel, and Tychicus preached the same truth in spite of the danger involved.

Paul sent Tychicus to these believers in Colossae not only to let them know how Paul was getting along, but also that Tychicus might observe how the Colossian believers were getting along in Paul's absence. Paul had won them to Christ; and he cared about them as if they were his children. Tychicus could observe and note whether any were returning to pagan practices or whether they were abiding faithful in their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Also Tychicus could "comfort your hearts" by preaching the promises of Christ he would have learned from the Apostle Paul himself. Paul knew full well the need for strengthening faith and for comforting reassurance in the spiritual experience of these new converts in Colossae. God is invisible; the Lord Jesus Christ is invisible: there would be strong temptation to turn again to the pagan practices they had forsaken. In the course of living, new situations would arise which needed some new aspect of the grace of Christ to be presented in some promise of God, so that the believers could continue in faithful obedience to the will of God. This Tychicus would note; and he would expound the Scripture that would sustain faith.

Tychicus did not come alone. Paul sent Onesimus with him. Onesimus apparently was a runaway slave, who once lived in Colossae. Apparently he was converted as he heard Paul preach, and had become "a faithful and beloved brother." No doubt Paul had the welfare of Onesimus in mind when he sent the former slave back to Colossae that he might repair what damage he had done in running away in the first place. Onesimus may not have been counted as one of the preachers of the Gospel as Tychicus was, but he was evidently a committed intelligent believer who could understand how necessary it was to make right whatever wrong he had done. He was sent along with Tychicus as a living demonstration of the reality of the Gospel and a proof of the sincerity of Paul as an apostle. Paul included Onesimus in the mission he had assigned to Tychicus. "They shall make known unto you all things which are done here." Knowing about the experiences and welfare of other believers is an encouragement and a source of strength to believers.

Paul then sent greetings from three other ministers who were associated with Paul in his ministry; which he carried on, even though he was in prison.

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) and Jesus, which is called Justus who are of the circumcision (Col. 4:10-11).

It is not known whether Aristarchus was a "fellow prisoner" because he was forcibly detained in prison with Paul, or that he had been given this title in recognition of his voluntary service as a willing companion with Paul. This Marcus is the Mark who accompanied Barnabas and Saul on their first

missionary journey; and who turned back to Jerusalem when Barnabas and Paul planned to go deeper into pagan country. When Mark wanted to go with them again on their second missionary journey, Paul did not want him to come along. Barnabas, who was Mark's uncle, wanted him to come along. Their difference of opinion was so strong that Barnabas and Paul separated. Paul took Silas with him, and Barnabas took Mark. It should be remembered that Paul retained great respect for Barnabas. And here we note that Paul counted Mark as one of his fellow workers, and commended him to the Colossians, that they should "receive him" if and when he came to them. Nothing is said of "Jesus, which is called Justus" beyond that he is included here with the other two.

It is noteworthy these three were "of the circumcision" meaning that they were Jews by natural birth, yet they were associated with Paul on his mission "to the Gentiles." This conveys a real message to our hearts. These Jews by natural birth were "fellow workers unto the Kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me," working with Paul and being a comfort to him while he was laboring among Gentiles for the Gentiles. Here is a practical demonstration of how being in the Lord resulted in peace between traditional enemies.

Paul then tells about Epaphras who was himself a Colossian, "who is one of you," calling him "a servant of Christ," literally a "bond-slave" of Christ. Paul mentions particularly how Epaphras prayed for the believers in Colossae "always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." Apparently Epaphras exercised his faith earnestly as he prayed for his fellow believers. He did not pray merely for relief from trouble or for endurance in time of stress, but he prayed constructively that the believers might be helped toward a certain goal. Epaphras wanted them to stand perfect (that meant full grown, mature) and complete (with all aspects of their living involved) in all the will of God. This challenges our own experience in prayer: do we have a clear conception of what "all the will of God" is for our fellow believers?

When we pray for our local congregation do we have a full grasp of what it would mean if they "stood perfect and complete in all the will of God"? Do we have in mind their personal spiritual experience? Do they read/study the Bible? Do they have a family altar? Do they practice stewardship? Are they involved in missions? Do they share in prayer meetings? Do they invite people to church? Do they witness for Christ? What would it mean to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"? Evidently Epaphras was much concerned.

Paul wrote about him "For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis." Epaphras was concerned for the spiritual welfare not only of his own congregation where he belonged, but also for the neighboring congregations. Here again we can feel the outreach of the Spirit of God. Naturally I would be concerned about me and mine, but spiritually I am concerned about others who also belong to the Lord.

"Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you." This reference to Luke is our basis for thinking that the author of "Luke" and "The Acts of the Apostles" was a doctor. When Paul refers to him as "beloved" we can get the idea that Luke was one who helped others, especially the sick. I think the fact that no comment is made about Demas is significant. Apparently this is the same person of whom Paul in another place wrote "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica. . ." I am inclined to think that Demas was already showing signs of leaning away from Paul.

Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans and that ye likewise read the

epistle from Laodicea (Col. 4:15-16).

Apparently these two congregations had much in common and found it helpful to share messages that would culture their faith.

Before ending his letter Paul sent a message to Archippus which remains something of an enigma. "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it" (4:17). Since there seems to be no clue as to what this ministry was; this Scripture can be taken as applicable to any believer. Every servant of the Lord receives some assignment. He should take heed to fulfill it to the glory of God.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Lord's Gifts**

#### **Colossians 1:3-14**

Paul opens the message of his epistle with an expression of thanksgiving to God for the blessing the believers at Colossae have received, and an affirmation of his continuing prayer for even more blessing. Paul was thankful for their faith in Christ Jesus. This would be basic to all the other blessing they would receive. We should note that Paul did not praise them for what they had done in their own wisdom and strength for Christ's sake. He rejoiced in what God had done to the believers in giving them such faith. Their faith was a faith in Christ Jesus. Faith in one another, faith in human effort, faith in human wisdom or human virtue, faith in human persistence would all be very natural and very flattering to the human beings involved, but this is not the faith for which Paul was thankful.

One of my radio outlets generally introduces the program of The Bible For You with a song about faith. But it is not faith in Christ Jesus that is being praised, it is just "faith" as a human exercise. It could mean "faith" in human effort, faith in high ideals, faith in the justice of one's cause, any number of various exercises of faith, but never faith as we try to present it in the Gospel: faith that just as surely as Christ Jesus died for me and rose again on the third day, even so will He carry out for me every/any promise that the Scripture sets forth on my behalf. It is very important to remember that it is faith in Christ Jesus that has the power to accomplish salvation. It is not an intellectual assent to, a willingness to accept a statement of historic fact as being true, but it is taking the promise to be true and acting on it.

In addition to receiving faith in Christ Jesus the believers received in themselves love to all the saints. This would mean that each believer would love all other believers. Thus a believer would love persons whom he had never seen. This would not be merely a benevolent attitude but would be a readiness to help where needed. In the early church this was manifested by a readiness to share worldly goods. "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45). Loving the brethren was far more than having sentimental goodwill. John discusses this in his first epistle.

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (I John 3:16-18).

Apparently the operation of such love was not so much a matter of doing what believers considered the right thing to do, as it was a matter of having the love of God in the heart which would prompt such

conduct from an inner motivation.

"Faith" seems to be the initial gift of the Holy Spirit, and "love" seems to be the normal result of having "faith." This can be felt as reasonable when it is considered that "faith" results in sins being forgiven and carried away. No wonder the heart is filled with the love of God. But there is yet another consequence. When faith brings the believer into personal relation with the living Lord Jesus Christ the believer receives "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." The Lord Jesus Christ will one day come to rule over all creation. Believers in Christ will share all that Christ will achieve and inherit at that time.

The promise of this hope had been preached in "the word of the truth of the Gospel" to the believers in Colossae and "in all the world." Everywhere it had been preached it had brought "forth fruit" as it did in Colossae "since the day ye heard of it and knew the grace of God in truth." Apparently the knowledge of the grace of God in truth was communicated by preaching. This emphasizes the fact that the truth of the grace of God is not discovered by human research. It is shared by preaching. In other words it must be told even as it was authorized in the Great Commission.

In I Corinthians 15:1-8 Paul specifically sets forth the Gospel. This is the message about Jesus Christ "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen . . ." The truth of the Gospel is that "In the fulness of time God sent forth His Son ... to redeem them that were under the law . . ." It was this remarkable truth that so profoundly affected the believers. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). At this point Paul wrote "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5).

It was when the Colossian believers heard what God had done in sending Jesus Christ to die that He might redeem sinners that they "know the grace of God in truth." This is what they had "learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ." It was from Epaphras that Paul had been informed about how the truth of the Gospel had affected them, "who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit. "Paul knew the truth of the Gospel "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). So when he heard of the love which abounded in their hearts he knew that they had learned the grace of God in truth. And this moved Paul to pray that they might be blessed even further.

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God {Col. 1:9-10}.

It appears that when believers know the truth of the Gospel they then can be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding which will enable them to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. This will result in their being fruitful in every good work. Good works can be recognized by remembering the law of God: worship, respect, regard, relief of the poor. It is when believers are being fruitful in such good works that they "increase in the knowledge of God."

It is easy to see how the motivation that will inspire and guide believers into such fruitfulness is the function of the love of God which is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost who was given to them. But there is yet more consequence in this spiritual experience: "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness" (verse 11). This is the remarkable course of experience for those who believe in Christ. The indwelling Holy Spirit strengthens the believer with the very power of God that raised the body of Jesus of Nazareth, to all

patience and long-suffering with joyfulness. Living along in the will of God will require "patience" and "longsuffering" in the course of self-denial, but that this can be done "with joyfulness" is truly a matter of triumph. But Paul has yet more to say!

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son (of the Son of His love) {Col. 1:12-13}.

At this point Paul turns our thoughts back to the basis for all our inward spiritual blessing:

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins (vs. 14).

It may be noted that at no point does Paul find any ground for motivation or for guidance in the situation or the circumstances or the persons involved. The dynamic for such walk "worthy of the Lord" is found in the operation of the Holy Spirit within who sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Cosmic Reconciler**

#### **Colossians 1:15-20**

The title of our chapter contains two words that call for definition. "Cosmic" is not a Bible word, but the meaning should not be too difficult to grasp. It evidently is intended to imply the whole universe on the grandest scale. It has been pointed out there is no word for universe in the Bible. The Scripture says "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Nowhere do the Scriptures approach any problem from any perspective other than heaven and earth. Reference is made to God's control of the heavenly bodies implying that God guides the stars in their courses. He made the sun and the moon but there is no comprehensive revelation of God's relation to the universe as we have come to see it in our time.

"Reconciler" obviously refers to one who reconciles. But here we are again peering into so much that is unknown and undescribed. To reconcile obviously means to bring together in harmony that which has been broken into alien parts. But just how we are to understand the application of the work of Christ to the universe in this sense is not clear to me. In Genesis we read at the time of the pronouncement of the curse following the sin of Adam and Eve, "cursed is the ground for thy sake." When the prophets described the reign of Messiah they seemed to allude to some side-benefits that would affect the natural world, such as "the desert shall blossom as the rose." Even certain changes would occur in the animal world as when it was prophesied in Isaiah 11:6-9 . . . "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain."

Something of such side effects of the work of Christ can be felt in Paul's discussion in Romans 8:18-22 ". . . Because the creature (creation) itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." However these are obscure passages, none of which are openly or specifically related to the work of Christ on the cross. I would not say there is no connection, but I do say the possible relation is not clearly stated, and I shrink from developing any forced interpretation on this theme.

However the passage in Colossians to which we are directed does clearly reveal Christ as Lord of all on a grand scale. It is important to keep in mind the two dimensions in which Jesus Christ is presented

in Scripture. He was eternally the Son of God, even as He was "the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world." We need to remember that His coming to the earth to be born of woman as a babe in Bethlehem was His own choice in obeying His Father's will. Thus we read:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:6-8).

In another Scripture we read: "A body hast thou prepared for me. . . Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." I have always felt this is properly taken as the Lord's response to His call to become incarnate.

There are aspects of truth in this passage that go far beyond any written revelation. Even though the words used are simple the ideas they reveal are profound. We can understand the statement that He is the "image of the invisible God," yet what does that really mean? What aspect of His person was the "image"? There is no description of His physical appearance, so it cannot be in His personal physical appearance. There is no description of His personality nor of His unique personal habits. In what aspect then shall we see Him as the "image of the invisible God"? We do see Him in response to the needy: the leper, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." "I will, be thou clean": the woman with the issue of blood, "If I can but touch the hem of His garment": the blind men "Lord, that we may receive our sight." Is this the "express image" of God?

And of course we see Him facing trial and enduring crucifixion. Is this "the image of the invisible God"? This could be what He wants us to know about His Father.

When He is spoken of as "the first-born of every creature" we understand that He is to be rated as "superior to" any and every created being. He is above all! And this superiority is based upon the fact that "by Him were all things created." The "all things" include all things "in heaven" which are not enumerated and not described. These things would be beyond our range, describing them would be meaningless to us. What goes on in heaven, what is in heaven is beyond our ken. It doth not yet appear what we shall be like. Of the things on earth mention is made of events of thrones, dominions, principalities, powers of these it is emphasized that they were created "by Him and for Him." In all this the accent is upon His being Lord of all. We are to think of Him as being Almighty, the Lord of all!

And then the apostle directs our attention to the fact that He holds a position above and beyond, "He is before all things." In all the universe He is to be seen as superior, over every created thing He is first. There is no mention of how He reached this position, it is a simple statement of the fact that He is above all, but then there is an additional truth, the existence of all things on earth is secured by His power, "by Him all things consist." They are held together as they are, and where they are, by His all embracing power. This is a description of power that is baffling to any reader. We simply cannot imagine what is implied when we read that by Him all things consist! Apparently it means that without Him all things would fall apart in chaos. And then we read that even in the New Creation He will be the Lord of all!

The present natural creation in which Christ is recognized as first/foremost is doomed to pass away. The sentence of death has been issued upon it. But Christ was raised from the dead into newness of life, eternal life. With Him will be His Body, the Church, who is "the beginning" in the New Creation, the first born from the dead. And He will be the Head of that Body! "That in all things He might have the pre-eminence." Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is to be first in every way, now and hereafter!

And all this is to be true because God willed it to be so. "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." No one could tell God what to do. He is single and alone in His control of all that

happens. Out of His own will He projected this plan to honor His beloved Son.

Apparently the major problem was the matter of sin. Because of sin Satan could threaten the whole plan of God in His creation. But by way of the Gospel, by His Son willingly offering Himself as a ransom for sinners, the schemes of Satan were defeated, and victory by the grace of God was achieved. It all hinged upon the work of Christ "having made peace through the blood of His cross." It staggers the imagination to try to grasp the full sweep of the triumph in the death of Christ. Somehow in that event something was done that defeated Satan in the spiritual world, even as it made it possible for the individual believer to defeat Satan in his personal human experience.

Thus God was able to achieve His purpose in creation. "By Him to reconcile all things unto Himself." Sin had caused havoc, plunging all creation into chaos with threatened ruin, but in the death of Christ the sentence of death was overcome. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ a new day dawned in the universe. Now God was able in all justice and equity to bring all things unto Himself through Jesus Christ.

By him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven (Col. 1:20).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Reconciliation In The Church**

#### **Colossians 1:21-2:7**

The reconciliation that Paul is discussing in this passage seems to be related to the estrangement and the hostility in the natural heart of the Colossians toward God. Paul wrote to the Romans:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

It was the common enmity in the natural heart against God that constituted the problem in Colossae. Paul had faced this problem in his own experience as he told the Ephesians:

... the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Ephesians 2:2-3).

And so Paul could say to these believers in Colossae "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works" with reference to their alienation from God and their hostility toward God. This was not so much alienation from each other or hostility between humans. This would doubtless be true anywhere at any time, and it would be changed when these people were reconciled to God; but the real problem was their rebellious attitude toward God Himself. It was this condition that was dealt with by Christ on the cross of Calvary as Paul reminded them: "yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." In some remarkable way the willing offering of Jesus of Nazareth to be the sacrifice whose blood would expiate the sins of the people brought sinners to God, and enabled Christ Jesus to present them to God as acceptable by His grace. Paul wrote "to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight."

In the words that Paul added to this statement it is implied that this blessed condition is dependent upon a continuing relationship with the living Lord. Paul wrote: "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." We should take note that there is no



promise that the sinner will be changed in himself: he will not be made so strong or so virtuous that he can stand in his own strength. He will be forever safe in the power of Christ who will hold him up, but apart from Christ he could do nothing and be nothing. This is the hope of the Gospel. The sins of the believer are being carried away in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth. To benefit from this the believer must remain in personal relationship with Christ.

The Gospel facts are not new or different. The situation in Colossae might be unique so that the actual local circumstances might be different there than in other places, but the basic facts of the Gospel grounded in the work of Christ were not changed. All that was available to the believers in Colossae was provided in that which Christ had done when he died on Calvary, was buried, was raised from the dead on the third day, and was seen. Paul could assure them about the Gospels "Which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven." The believers in Colossae had heard the Gospel even as we hear it: as it is preached.

Apparently the operation of the work of Christ involved Christ responding to the believers' faith by joining the sinner in his sin, and then assuming the guilt and the sin in His own flesh, and dying for the sin according to the law. This involved the suffering of the crucifixion. And now it seems that Paul himself shared in this suffering of Christ by his own imprisonment because of his preaching the Gospel. We can remember Paul would not have been in prison if he had not preached the very Gospel the Colossian believers received and believed. Just as Christ would not have died on Calvary if He had not undertaken to save the sinners, "Whereof I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."

All of this seems to imply that the action of Christ in suffering for sins included not only His physical dying in the crucifixion, but also His suffering in His apostles and His ministers as they preached His Gospel throughout the world. Paul understood his own imprisonment because of his preaching the Gospel to be an extension of the suffering of Christ when He gave Himself to die on the cross, and he rejoiced that he was thus able to share in the saving work of Christ.

Paul recognized that he had been given by God the great privilege of completing the total Gospel revelation by expounding the truth of the great mystery in the grace of God, which had been unknown through the ages, but was now to be openly revealed. Paul was conscious of the fact that he had the commission to thus complete the revelation of the true meaning of all that Christ Jesus had accomplished in His death, burial, resurrection and manifestation of eternal life. Paul wrote:

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God: even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints (Col. 1:25-26).

Paul realized that he had been given the task of revealing to believers certain truth that was implicit in the Gospel, but which had never been openly expounded. Christ had not only died to carry away our sins and to reconcile us to God, but in the resurrection and in the Pentecostal coming of the Holy Spirit Christ now lived in the born again believer to do the will of God. Paul was particularly assigned the task to make known this truth among the Gentiles. All God's saints are to know this profound truth because it is basic to their living in triumphant faith, but Paul was specifically to share it with Gentile believers, "to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (1:27).

"Glory" is the term that refers to "harvest." It brings to our mind the final fulfillment of salvation. In the work of salvation God calls the sinner who is lost, doomed to destruction to repent and trust in Him. Christ Jesus will carry away the sins and reconcile the forgiven sinner to God, who will regenerate him and adopt him as a child of God. God will then send His Holy Spirit to dwell in the believer showing him the things of Christ. Christ will then come into the living experience of the believer and live His life (that is Christ's life) in the believer to the glory of God. All this performance of Christ in the believer is operative according to his faith.

Faith is not constant and needs to be nurtured, so Paul preached that believers might grow in faith and thus become mature. Paul's words were:

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:28).

Paul applied himself diligently in his preaching, because the living Lord was working in his heart in mighty fashion on behalf of the believers to whom he was preaching. Paul wrote:

Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily (1:29)

Paul's prayer life was featured by strenuous spiritual conflicts as he agonized for the spiritual well-being of believers both at Colossae and at Laodicea. It is striking to note that such exercise in prayer was on behalf of persons whom he had never seen. He had heard about them and he knew their circumstances. So he engaged in prayer on their behalf being urgently desirous that they should be comforted in their mutual love and their spiritual understanding. Paul's words were as follows:

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:1-3).

Paul knew that there was always danger of believers being led astray by smooth attractive speakers. The whole realm of faith is approached and cultivated in the mind, and so here is where there is peril. Paul warned the Colossians to be on the alert, but he took courage when he remembered the good reports about their reputation. Paul wrote:

And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ (Col. 2:4-5).

Paul knew that the blessing upon these Colossian believers would come in their relationship to the living Lord. At no time did Paul feel that these believers could be blessed if they would follow rules or practices, in any attempt to accomplish on their own what would result in desirable consequences. The great hidden fact which would make all the difference in the outcome was the presence and the power of the living Lord. As Paul wrote:

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving (Col. 2:6-7).

And as we have gone through with this meditation, we cannot help but be impressed with this aspect

of Paul's ministry. He cared about people he had not even seen. They were neighboring churches, neighboring congregations, people he had not even preached to, and he labored on their behalf. He struggled that they might come to faith. This is the way it would work in a man's heart when his heart is filled with the work of the Holy Spirit, when it is the Lord Jesus Christ in the heart pushing the man along, guiding the man along, He will lead the man into concern for other believers that they too might grow in grace and become mature to the glory of God. And we could just humbly ask the Lord to grant that we might be that way. Let us be concerned about the other believers even in other congregations than our own.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Controlling Forces Then**

#### **Colossians 2:8-23**

In the life of a believer attention is directed to forces outside of self. Faith in God is a matter of focussing respectful attention to that which is invisible, because of certain convictions we have on the basis of what we have been told. Just because our attention is focussed upon the invisible we are liable to be approached by thinkers and teachers who also focus attention upon the invisible, but in a different way. They may argue that certain ideas that have been long esteemed are actually unreasonable and that we should think and act differently because it is more reasonable to act in some new way. Thus Paul writes:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:8-9).

The word "spoil" is used here in the military sense, meaning "despoil," "rob." There is always the danger that a believer can be persuaded to act some other way than by obedience to the indwelling Christ with the result that he will lose his blessing as from the Lord. In such a case he is being robbed of his blessing which he would have had by obeying the indwelling Christ. Then again the believer may be moved by the "rudiments of the world," which John tells us are "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:16). Since these elements are all around us in the natural world there is always the danger of being tempted to choose that way of doing things and thereby losing the blessing we could have had and would have had if we had obeyed the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul undertakes to point out what a wonderful privilege the believer has in belonging to Jesus Christ. To begin with, nothing is lacking for the believer because Jesus Christ is above all else in authority and power. We read: "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (2:10), also because the believer is identified with Christ he shares in all the benefits which Christ has gained in His perfect obedience. The believer shares in the circumcision of Christ in putting off the sins of the flesh; he is buried with Him in baptism and he is also risen with Him. Thus Paul writes:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11-12).

I can recognize how easily you could feel this is all so obscure. It is out of sight. And it is true. Your faith penetrates into the invisible things but be patient about it. Let the Word of God teach you. Together with the resurrection with Christ the believer is blessed with forgiveness of sins, and with deliverance from the ordinances that were against him. Paul states all this in clear terms when he writes:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross (Col. 2:13-14).

In His death on the cross and in His resurrection from the dead Jesus Christ won a notable victory over the forces that were against Him and against us. In that victory the believer is also set free, being delivered from the powers of darkness; and thus Satan is robbed of his prey. Because of sin the soul had been in bondage to death with Satan in control, but now that Christ had given Himself to die as a ransom the penalty of death for sin had been paid. When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead He could live forever in newness of life with eternal life. By faith the believer could share in this everlasting life to the glory of God, thus Paul could say "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (verse 15).

As God's people had tried to live in the will of God they had developed a system of rules and regulations, aiming thereby to control their flesh by preventing evil conduct. This system had become a cumbersome burden, as well as being ineffectual. By His death on the cross Christ had paid the penalty for all infractions of that law and by His resurrection He was now free to live forever without any rules or regulations to bind Him. The believer would share in this liberty, and so Paul could exult:

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ (Col. 2:16-17).

Such regulations prohibiting wrongdoing were not wrong, though they were ineffectual. When Christ would come in eternal life He would obey every rule, every regulation, not because it was imposed upon Him, but because in His righteousness He would delight to do His Father's will to please His Father.

Apparently there were teachers abroad who proposed to find help to live as they should by willingly humbling themselves before spiritual forces, attempting to achieve the desired virtues by manipulating such spiritual forces according to their human understanding. All such efforts were doomed to failure because they did not yield themselves to the supreme authority of Jesus Christ who said of Himself "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Thus Paul could urge the Colossian believers:

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshiping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God (Col. 2:18-19).

In this passage there is intimated that it would occur that there would be spiritual teachers and leaders who would seek by psychic means to achieve spiritual results. Apparently such would seek relationship with the invisible world of angels according to their own manipulation, but would be doomed to failure because they did not approach the spiritual powers through Christ, who alone is able to prosper the seeking soul because of His almighty sovereign control.

Inasmuch as the Colossian believers had accepted Christ by faith so that they counted themselves to be dead with Christ they would count themselves as unresponsive to the elements prevailing in this world. Being dead to the things of this world there would be no reason why they should heed the rules and regulations by which their responses to this world should be governed according to the ideas of godly men of old. Such regulations were largely negative, and were actually religious in their style. Although they were designed by men and prompted by human will power, they were actually not given over to indulgence. They actually practised discipline of the body and even ascetic control of human appetites. But they were entirely human and gave no honor to Christ. Paul discusses this aspect in detail saying:

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using; after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh (Col. 2:20-23).

And so Paul has discussed the controlling forces that were active among the people of his day and time and among the time of the Colossians. They had people among them that were interested in what we would call religion, and in trying to do right, but they tried to work this out by a set of rules and tried to figure it out in such a way that if anybody wanted to do it they could do it. That is not true. Only Christ can do it and it is only as you and I have Christ working in us that we can expect this to happen. We do not need to feel hesitant about that; we can have every assurance that He is able: He is almighty. He can do it and He will do it for those who put their trust in Him.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Controlling Forces Now**

#### **Colossians 2:8-23**

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:8-9).

Our study in this session is directed to noting how conditions we face today are similar to the conditions that prevailed in Colossae when Paul wrote his epistle. The preaching of the Gospel to the Colossians had resulted in definite benefits. Believers enjoyed peace of mind, freedom from fear, deliverance from the influence of evil spirits, and blessed communion with other believers, and the Lord. That these changes were real no one could deny.

But there were active in Colossae teachers who offered explanation of such changes as natural human events, in such a way as to avoid giving any credit to the living Lord Jesus Christ. If there was any glory to be given it was given to men. Also such teachers would hold forth the idea that since man had accomplished so much in these changes due to natural processes, people could expect that there would be continuous improvement indefinitely. And all such desirable changes would occur naturally without any help from the living Christ.

When we look at conditions surrounding us today, we see that through philosophy the theory of evolution has become the prevailing mode of thought in universities, colleges, high schools and even in grammar schools. Despite the fact that this theory has been challenged by competent scholars who maintain that it is not valid, because of the total lack of evidence to support its claims, it is still

presented in popular fashion as true. There are many forms of evolution talked about but they are all alike in that they offer to account for changes in people apart from any function of the living Lord Jesus Christ. In this respect they would do to believers today what Paul warned against when he wrote, "Beware lest any spoil (despoil-rob) you through philosophy and vain deceit."

The ancient Greeks, who knew nothing of Jesus Christ, had developed evolutionary ideas. Philosophers today are prone to claim men have always held to evolution as the principle that will account for all changes. Then they add to this the idea that all progress and improvement in human experience is due to evolution. There is no denying that believers are changed for the better, but the Gospel would say this is because the living Lord is at work: "Christ in you the hope of glory." Since all changes are not for the better as is evidenced by deterioration and degradation to be seen on all sides, such philosophical optimism is "vain deceit." Paul warns against it.

Paul goes on to say "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." This is to say that all the functions of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost, were all operative in the personal presence of Jesus of Nazareth. The Scriptures record "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Thus Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnate Word of God.

Do we hold the Scriptures to be the Word of God? Would we not say that Hebrews 11:3 is Scripture? is it the Word of God? What does it say? "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Is this not a direct denial of the claim of evolution? Then let our ministers of the Gospel openly condemn the theory of evolution as being "not after Christ." Let our ministers and Bible class teachers, let our Sunday Schools and our young people's work openly repudiate all evolutionary input into our Religious Education. This theory is one of our "Controlling Forces Now." If anyone wants to do something that will "make peace" in the spiritual life of believers and in the church now (today) here is the place to begin.

As we read on in this epistle we find that Paul gave further specific guidance.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ (Col. 2:16).

If regulations about eating/drinking/religious practices are only "a shadow of things to come," and we have repudiated *the shadow* what is the body? the reality that *cast* the *shadow*? Since the *shadow* consisted of regulations that imposed restrictions upon the free use of the flesh shall we think the *body* allows the flesh to run rampant? Is it not to be expected that where the *shadow* (in the law) imposed arbitrarily upon unwilling flesh certain restrictions, the *body* would be an outgoing joyous obedience to the will of God?

We can see an example of how this worked out in the case of Paul.

But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend (I Corinthians 8:8-13).

This is Paul's own report of how he had been set free from all regulations, but how he was not free to

act in any way that would offend anybody. While Paul had been still under the law he had been forbidden to eat meat that had been offered to idols. When in the Lord he realized that idols were nothing, and the meat was just as good for food after the idolatrous ceremony as it was before, he was free to eat any meat. But if his eating meat that had been offered to idols would mislead some other soul to eat such meat when he personally thought that was sin, then Paul could gladly say "I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Instead of depending on rules and regulations Paul was now in the Gospel able to advise believers "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).

Problems of conduct will emerge today in social situations. In our heterogeneous society problems will arise between opposing social groups, and between conflicting social philosophers. Seeking to reconcile such group opposition and to harmonize such contrary views, would be an impossible task. So many variations of conflict would occur it would be impractical to attempt to draft patterns of guidance that would apply in every case. And this whole approach would be unsound. This would be turning to the law just as in the Old Testament. It would be an attempt to state by definition "this is right" "that is wrong." Such procedure would aim to establish "the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees." Actually the bottom line must be "But seek ye first the kingdom of God. And his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

One must be careful not to get too sophisticated about Christian conduct. It is always wholesome to recall "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). In another Scripture we read the words of Jesus of Nazareth "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). And this is also good to remember when one is being challenged to think of interracial situations, of international problems in terms of the Gospel. Mark records the Lord Jesus as saying, "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark 10:15).

By way of bringing the message of Colossians to bear upon our contemporary problems,

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (Col. 2:20).

"Why, as though living in the world are ye involved in thinking about politics? or international affairs."

Were there no politics in the Roman Empire? No international affairs in the days of the Caesars?

My observation is that there is not one record that Jesus of Nazareth ever at any time made any reference to politics or social problems. And I do not know of one word from Paul or Peter or James that had any reference to community issues or problems: such considerations would be dealing with "the commandments and doctrines of men."

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Peacemaker's Own Peace**

#### **Colossians 3:1-17**

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:2):

This verse became very precious to me on the occasion of a crisis that occurred in my life many years ago. At the time I was teaching school in a country community. The young men in the community were organized to play baseball. I was manager of the team. To finance our Ball Club and to provide uniforms the club promoted an evening of entertainment with a program that included a concert, debate, Box Social and dance. The proceeds provided the funds for our season's expenses.

I shared in the concert, debate and Box Social which lasted till after midnight but I did not stay for the dance. Previously I had often shared in neighborhood dances. But since I had committed myself to go as a missionary I had decided not to dance anymore. And so I did not share in the dance on that night.

Some days later I was disturbed by the ethical issue: how could I wear the uniform that had been bought with the money derived from the program that included dancing? At this distance in time, more than 55 years ago, it does not seem to have been such a, big issue: but at that time it was very big. For three nights I could not sleep! I wanted to play so very much. We were to play the opening game of our league season on a Friday night. I was batting third in the line-up and was expecting to make some key hits. But I was thwarted by the ethics involved.

On Thursday night, my third sleepless night, while reading the Bible for guidance, I read "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"! In a flash I saw my answer: my problem was that I wanted to play ball! That was obviously a "thing on the earth."

Then I read the context:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:1-3).

Suddenly it all became so clear to me. It seemed to be mainly a matter of which person did I want to be: a healthy vigorous young man about 25 years old eager to play baseball (I could hit the ball "a country mile"; in a double header I once hit seven consecutive doubles "two base hits!"); or a child of God whose first desire was to be "well pleasing in His sight."

Later in my life I was so thankful there was nothing evil involved to cloud the issue. Playing ball is certainly not evil, but playing ball because I had my affection set on it, rather than on the favor of God was evil. It is not easy to think of myself as "dead" but this *is vital*. Paul discusses this at length in Romans 6:1-11. "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11). What this would actually mean is set forth in this very passage in Colossians.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry . . . But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another (Col. 3:5-9).

It may be that you will not have to fight a major battle at each one of these points but that issue may arise at any of these points. This is not because the issue involves matters evil in themselves, but primarily because they appeal to the flesh rather than to the choice of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 9 "... ye have put off the old man with his deeds." Often the deeds of the old man are evil in themselves, crude, vulgar, wicked, but sometimes the issue escapes our notice because nothing intrinsically evil is involved. Right here a common trouble develops. A person may be so carefully trained and disciplined that there is no intrinsically wicked issue at stake. It is not always easy to see



that the real issue is a matter of why do I want to do whatever? If I want that for personal reasons it pleases me it is my idea of what should be done, this may be what is wrong.

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:10-11).

We can note here that this new man is not to be classed in any one group. To be sure he is not "white," but he is not "black" either. Certainly he is not rich," but he is not "poor" either. We may readily concede that he is not a "capitalist," but we must hasten to say he is not a "communist" either.

Putting on the new man is not a matter of changing the social order, nor does it have anything to do solving economic or political issues in the world at large. It is simply a matter of giving up all interest in the problems of the natural world, and settling the basic problem involved in yielding oneself in the Gospel to Christ, so that the situation will be established which has "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Paul then proceeds on a more positive, practical note.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye (Col. 3:12-13).

The use of this inelegant word "bowels" is a reflection of the prevailing psychology. Today we would say "a heart of mercy." It is interesting to note the imperative mood "put on" as if the believer could do this. Having "put on" the new man "Christ in you, the hope of glory," he would be able to adopt this pattern of conduct mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness just as if he had no interest of a personal nature. He could do this because he reckoned himself "dead" in all carnal interests.

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness (Col. 3:14).

The figure here is that of a person putting on items of clothing. The last item would be a sash that would surround everything to hold things in place. Paul considered "charity" to be such an overall sash, holding all other virtues in proper place.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful (Col. 3:15).

The word "rule" can be translated as "umpire". "Let the peace of God umpire in your hearts" "to the which also ye are called in one body." Let every decision be made in the interest of peace: that means "giving up," "giving over," "letting go" of your own etc., "and be ye thankful"; no matter what happens.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).

This will nurture faith. We sing the gracious truths of the Gospel.

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:17).

And then Paul proceeds to indicate that he has in mind the great issues of the spiritual truth involved are to be seen in personal actions within the home, right where the believer lives!

## **Chapter 8**

### **Peace At Home And At Work**

#### **Colossians 3:18-4:1**

Our Scripture for this lesson is shorter and focusses attention upon the home in which the believer is living. It is helpful to read this in its context. One should read Colossians 3:12-17 to get the perspective within which we can get the true meaning of the specific guidance given. It is very important as we approach the problems of the personal relationships specified, that we be careful not to make this approach on the basis of accepting contemporary cultural developments as being normal, and then making Scripture suit the situations as we find them today; rather we need to proceed from the basic fact "Christ in you, the hope of glory, "and see how this has bearing upon our lives.

While our culture in the Western world has seen the concept of the home deteriorate due to sinful practices, the primary elements of the home are unchanged. Beginning with husband-wife relationship, the home normally has parents and children, and sometimes master and servants. These are specific instances of person to person relationship in special situations. The guiding principle for the believer is derived from the Christ-believer relationship.

The Old Testament records the history of Israel showing that despite all the help from the revelation of the law of God through Moses, the functioning of providence in God's control of Israel's history, and the ministry of the prophets who interpreted the application of the law in their national affairs, Israel proved to be incorrigible. They were never able to achieve the righteousness which God required.

Then the prophets began to reveal that God would do a new thing: God would deal with Israel in a New Covenant. The basic thrust of the New Covenant is that God would send His Chosen Servant, the Messiah, in the form of a human being, to achieve perfect righteousness in His own life which could then be shared with any soul who would accept Him as Savior and Lord. There is here a very important truth, which is difficult for the natural mind to grasp or understand.

The Bible points out that all human beings because of their birth are directly related to Adam. His life is in them. Because his life became sinful all his seed were born sinful, and were thus doomed to destruction. There is also revealed the truth in the Gospel, God sent His only begotten Son into the world that He might save such as believe in Him into everlasting life. Just as Adam was the cause for this sinfulness of all human beings, even so Christ is the cause for the righteousness of all believers in Him. Paul discusses this in Romans 5:12-21.

Arising out of this feature of God's plan is the fact that man cannot do what should be done in his own strength, his wit or his wisdom. It is a common development that persons will be tempted to try to accomplish what will qualify them for blessings in their own strength. There is an element of pride in this self-confidence. To repent requires humility. The natural heart tends to abili wants to seek self-justification. We are reminded how Paul described his own kinsmen, the Jews, in writing to the Romans.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going

about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Romans 10:1-4).

We need to be very careful that we do not fall into this same snare.

It is very natural to gladly describe the life that is lived in the will of God with the thought in mind that this is what we want. Almost unconsciously we begin to plan how we are going to produce such desirable result. It is very natural to fall into the snare to accept the challenge as for ourselves. We will explore our psychology to find out how we may get it done; we will study sociology to see how it is accomplished among others. We will survey the general situation in society to seek to understand the problems we must face as we try to live in our present world. And all the time we will be projecting a concept of what we must try to do. And thus we will be making the very mistake which Paul saw that the Jews had made: it could be said of us "Not understanding God's way of producing righteousness in us, we go about to do it ourselves seeking to achieve acceptable living by our own efforts, because we have not yielded to God's way."

And thus we come to the basic truth in Paul's message to the Colossians. The primary principle in the experience of believers in Christ is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The immediate result of having this principle operative in the believer can be seen in Colossians 3:12-17. There is an obedient response from within to the fact that Christ died for the believer. With Christ Himself living out His own life in the believer, the believer will be inwardly impelled to operate in mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, and all these under the general attitude of charity. In all the issues that may arise the governing principle will be the peace of God which will "umpire" in all situations, with "thanksgiving." There will be no critical issues of decisions to be made. Every possible issue would be already settled in the will of Christ: "not my will, but thine be done." Paul concludes this admonition with a general exhortation: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (3:17). And we can feel how properly the specific situations are then dealt with.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord (Col. 3:18).

Since the believing wife reckons herself "dead" there is no problem of contrary wishes. She has no interest of her own, finding her joy in the welfare of her husband. This will not sound acceptable to many today, but this was not written to please men or women.

Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them (Col. 3:19).

Regardless of the wife's conduct. This response is not generated by the wife, but by "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord (Col. 3:20).

Again this is regardless of how the parents act. The parents do not bring such obedience out of their children by their own conduct in management, etc. but believing children live out "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged (Col. 3:21).

Believing parents are to discipline themselves in dealing with their children, that they may not put a burden on the children that may discourage them. This seems to recognize that the faith which will make it possible for Christ to have His way in the hearts of the children may not be strong enough on occasion. The older, perhaps more mature, parent should thus be careful not to make it too difficult for the child to be humbly responsive to the will of Christ in him.

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons (Col. 3:22-25).

It is interesting to note that more instruction is given to servants than to any other category. This may well be because there is greater need for the believer to understand what will happen to him as a servant.

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven (Col. 4:1).

This is guidance given to those who are in position to decide how others will be treated. There seems to be an instruction here that there is a sense in which believers can expect to be treated as they treat others.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again (Matthew 7:1-2).

Such thoughts will guide a yielded, submissive believer in Christ into conduct that will please God.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Prayerful, Faithful, Salty Peacemakers**

#### **Colossians 4:2-6**

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving (Col. 4:2).

It is the common expectation that in the church, from the Bible, we will hear instruction about living. We expect it will be pointed out this would be right, this would be good; so we should all do thus and so. This suits the natural mind, and we are inclined to feel we heard a good sermon, we had a good class meeting, if we come away inspired to do better. In all this we can be so easily misled because of our natural dispositions. It is so natural to assume that if I am going to be blessed I will certainly have to do the right, the good thing.

From this outlook it is also natural that I start by describing the features of what would be right and good. And then I would project what steps I should take to achieve this result of what is right and what is good. This whole procedure is quite out of place in presenting the Gospel. In all that I have here set forth I have not even mentioned Jesus Christ. In this natural approach I would be tempted to project aspects of the testimony about Jesus Christ and to propose that He set an example for us to try to emulate that we should try to be like Him. It could be argued that I should derive guidance and inspiration from His conduct, and that I should commit my efforts to seeking to live and to serve as He

did.

I shall not take the time to point out the fallacies in such an approach to the problem of being blessed. It is just as wrong as "putting the cart before the horse." The truth is very simple: we put it in song to say:

"My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

The great dynamic in living in Christ is the fact that He died for me; in His present relationship with me He guides me and moves me to do His will. It is the practical operation of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Paul described the situation every believer is in when he wrote:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

The unit of mankind in relationship with God is the person, the individual, it is not a city, nor a nation, nor a race, nor a social order. When God became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, He came as a person. When He does His work of salvation He does it in a person. This is so simple it can be missed altogether, but it is profound. The New Testament does not deal with collective nouns: there is no Christian family, but there are Christian husbands, Christian wives, Christian parents, Christian children; no Christian army, but Christian soldiers; no Christian nation but Christian citizens.

So we look for guidance for personal relationship with Christ. Where Paul writes "Continue in prayer" he is referring to an exercise that is as normal to living in faith, as breathing is to a human body. Praying is not a matter of making a request, of voicing a petition, it is a matter of communing with the Lord in terms of Scripture. By the way when we are thinking about this, it is not a matter of 20 people getting together to pray. It is not a matter of 50 people meeting on Wednesday night to pray. If there is going to be any praying done each one will have to do it. "Continue in prayer" is a personal matter. Praying is done by the individual.

It was by hearing the Word of God in the Scriptures that the soul found faith to commit himself to Christ Jesus that he might be saved. It is by reading, studying, meditating upon the Scriptures that faith is sustained and nurtured. With "Christ in you, the hope of glory" the believer is in the presence of Christ as he reads the Bible, meditates upon it, and sees the promises of God which are now directed to him personally.

When Paul writes "Watch in the same with thanksgiving" he is urging us to see all aspects of our daily living in relation to the living Lord. God is in control of all; He makes every provision; everything we have to live by is from God; every promise we can count on is from God; everything that happens is under God's control: so we should "in everything give thanks." Paul goes on to write:

Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak (Col. 4:3-4).

We should note that Paul felt a specific responsibility to make plain "the mystery of Christ" as he preached the Gospel. This was to be the basic thrust of his preaching. We need to remember that the mystery of Christ<sup>1</sup> was not a telling of the historic facts of the Gospel: it was not the history of Jesus of

Nazareth that was the "mystery"; but as Paul plainly stated in Colossians:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:26-27).

The whole truth of "Christ in you" was the special theme of the message which Paul preached.

There is no direct exhortation to believers in this epistle that they should pray. When they were urged to "watch in the same with thanksgiving" it was not a matter of their being self-conscious as they were praying so that they would approve their manner of praying: it was a matter of looking for results. It would be Christ praying through them, and they were to note what was happening as a result of Christ praying in them and through them.

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time (Col. 4:5).

That last phrase can be translated "buying up the opportunities." There will be times when "those that are without," the unbelievers whom we meet, may be specially open to hearing the Gospel. Paul wanted the believers in Colossae to be ready to take advantage of such moments. It would appear that such moments could be recognized as the believers walked in common sense.

The whole message of the Gospel may not be known nor accepted by the unbelievers, but there will be some aspects that could make "good sense" to anybody. It is true the believer has unseen spiritual experiences he cannot share with nor present to unbelievers, but there can be practical aspects of blessed living that could be appreciated by anybody in the natural world. Unbelievers need to be shown that it makes "good sense" to turn to Christ in the Gospel.

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man (Col. 4:6).

The believer should be careful in his personal contacts with others at all times. He should be careful of what he says and how he says it. "With grace" may refer to their personal attitude toward others: always showing "undeserved kindness and favor toward others." This would enhance the witness of the believers among all men. "Graciousness" like "courtesy" is so becoming and winsome in a witness for Christ. This phrase "with grace" may also refer to the content of their witness, as they make sure that all who hear understand salvation is made possible through the grace of God. "By grace are ye saved through faith."

In all of these things that we have been discussing and thinking about the conduct of the believers, it is well for us to keep in mind all the way through this is not something that the believers are going to aim at, to do. This is not something that they are going to try and achieve by the way in which they live. This is something that Christ will work in them. Now that we have had this discussion, you could very wisely read again what you have in chapter 4 in verses 2-6. And this will help you to see how Paul describes the kind of living that will go on when people are filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

## **Chapter 10**

### **The Origin of Peace**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:

against such there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).

Many years ago when I was pastor I was during a certain time unusually busy. I had a congregation of 450 people. We were in the big depression and had let our youth minister go so that I was leading the young people's work. Then we had let our church secretary go. I carried on the full flow of services doing the office work, doing my correspondence in longhand. At the same time I was enrolled in S.M.U. in my senior year taking 6 subjects by special permission (2 of them laboratory courses which meant two afternoons in the week I spent two hours in the laboratory). I was very very busy and had gotten tired!

My good wife had helped me to adopt a schedule to be sure that all the work was done, with nothing neglected. The schedule provided that on Tuesday forenoon I would prepare Sunday morning's sermon.

So on a given Tuesday I was at home working on my Sunday morning message. I was engaged in preaching a series on "The Fruit of the Spirit" Galatians 5:22. From the kitchen my wife called "What are you doing?" I called back "Working on my morning sermon." "What are you going to preach on?" "Peace." "Haven't got it, have you?" Suddenly I realized: I did not have peace!

Yet it was the "Fruit of the Spirit"! This was the third message in the series! Love Joy Peace! As I sat there and reflected, I realized I did not have "joy" either! Oh I had talked about it, and doubtless said some true things about it, but I did not have "joy."

And then I realized I did not have "love"! I did not really love the Bible! I believed it! I respected it! I appreciated it! But I did not love it! Nor did I love preaching! Nor did I love the people! Nor did I really love God! I just did not love anything or anybody!

All that revelation of my own lack of love frightened me! I cancelled plans for visitation Tuesday afternoon, for activities Tuesday night, and I spent that whole time meditating. What was I going to do about this? I did not have any joy and I did not have any love. How could I talk then about peace? On Wednesday I did not go to the office in the forenoon. I cancelled plans for visitation Wednesday afternoon. I seemed to get special permission to conduct prayer meeting Wednesday night, but I was becoming deeply disturbed.

Wasn't "peace" one of the fruits of the Spirit? If I had no "peace," no "joy," no "love," how could I be sure I had the Holy Spirit in me? And if I did not have the Holy Ghost in me, then how could I count myself a believer? How could I say I was a Christian? And how could I preach when I did not have assurance that I was a true believer? This became a very serious sticky problem!

I slept very little Wednesday night. I sat in a lawn swing at midnight asking "What is peace? Where is peace? Where is the peace of God?" I tried to think "In the depth of a forest?" There would still be some sound. "On a vast desert plain?" Maybe so. but there would nothing there. "In the depths of the sea?" "Among the distant stars?" Perhaps, but not down here in Dallas, Texas!

All day Thursday (my day off in the schedule) I was brokenly forced to conclude "I am just not fit to preach"! This was shattering! I was a pastor, depending on my salary for food, on our manse for shelter, but without faith I was unfit to preach! Another sleepless night and then finally on Friday I accepted the fact that I would have to resign my pulpit, leave my church, and go back into the world!

Now the practical problem arose which Elder should I choose to tell? I had been honest as an agnostic, could I be less than honest being a professed believer? All day Friday I reviewed the matter: I did not have peace! This was one of the fruits of the Spirit! Then I did not have the Spirit! Then I was not qualified to minister Christ!

Throughout the day on Friday I meditated on the nature of peace. What did it mean? absence of trouble? fear? pain? Then I would dwell on the practical aspects of my situation, how soon would I have

to move? Where would I go? Which Elder should I approach?

By Friday night the matter seemed settled. I would terminate my pastorate on the ground that I was not fit to preach, since apparently I did not have the fruit of the Spirit. Since that pressing issue now seemed out of the way, I began to think more generally. Why would I be fooled like this? What actually was the matter with me? Why could I not have peace, which I wanted?

Early Saturday morning, as I tried to understand my own case, in my reading I came across these verses in Romans:

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:6-7).

And then there came to my mind an illustration from nature. All the necessary food elements are in the soil in the garden, but if you sowed the beans on that ground in Canada during winter, there would be no plants, and thus no beans. All the necessary ingredients might be present in the soil, the water and the air, but there would be no beans because all was frozen. But when Spring came, so that the sun would warm the ground and shine directly on the young plants the beans would not only sprout, but would grow, and in due time would produce beans for the table.

And then it all dawned on me. The difference would be because of the sun. The sun wasn't in the garden, but it shone on the garden. As I applied this illustration to my case I could see my heart as the garden soil in winter time. Then I could see the truth of Calvary as the sun shining into my heart and making my heart warm to the truth of His dying for me. Then I would be able to believe.

Then I chanced in my reading to note this passage:

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (I John 4:10).

And then again it was so plainly stated "We love Him, because He first loved us." Oh what a wonderful relief! It is God's initiative. He started the whole operation. We were dead in trespasses and sins. He came to save us because He wanted to! Here is the cure we all need! When my heart gets sluggish and cold about Jesus Christ, then let me bring myself to the cross and see again, He died for me! This will strengthen my faith and your faith and warm my heart and your heart. This will lead you through self-denial to commit yourself to do His will and to entrust all into His hands! And you can have peace to the glory of God. And praise His Holy Name for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.

## **Chapter 11**

### **The Peace of God**

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17).

The phrase "the peace of God" can be applied to at least two aspects of "peace." It does not refer to any state of God in Himself. It is not a peace that He has. It is a peace that He achieves, He gives, He arranges for. It is a peace that He brings about. It is something He does for human beings that believe in Him. And in this respect there are two aspects which we should distinguish, because of the two aspects of trouble which a man may experience.



It is natural for a person to have trouble. Job said "yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). When trouble is removed a person can have rest or peace. "Peace" is a wonderful word, just as "rest" is a wonderful prospect. It is when the cause of trouble is removed that a person has peace; it is when one is free from all turmoil a person can rest.

Trouble arises between the soul and God because of sin. And trouble occurs between persons because of conflicting desires and aims. The first kind of trouble is most easily dealt with. Trouble with God because of sin is ended when sin is forgiven. And because of the death of Christ on my behalf this is what happens for me. This is not easy to believe. It is natural to expect when I do wrong I will suffer. If I make a mistake, I will lose. But it belongs to the glory of God that by His grace He sent His Son to redeem me. It is for my benefit that Christ died on the cross. And I should thank Him that He gives me grace even now to be able to believe His promise "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish (John 3:16). Thus Paul could write "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

The other aspect of trouble is much more difficult to handle. Trouble occurs because of the conflict of interest between human beings. It is characteristics of sinful persons to be selfish. Each person naturally is interested in that which it would please him to have or to do. My personal idea of trouble between persons is illustrated by picturing what happens when two boys come into a room at the same time looking for a chair to sit on. There is only one chair which both see at the same time. Each goes to get the chair at the same time. The ensuing conflict is because of their personal interests. Each wants the chair. This conflict is natural, but it can be resolved. Peace is possible. It only requires that one of the boys should deny himself and give the chair to the other boy. That would be the end of the trouble.

But this is not natural. However it is spiritual. The basic principle here is "self denial." This is the primary principle operating in the living of a believer in Christ. "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). As we think of what is involved we can readily say "You can't expect that of people all the time," and that is right, but this is exactly what follows because of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." As the believer in Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he is forever set on "Go" when any issue arises where his personal interests are involved. The believer who has "reckoned himself indeed to be dead," has no further personal interest. Since he counts himself to be dead, he is able to turn away from any situation in which he would naturally have interest. He can give up anything/everything.

Paul described himself in this very context when he wrote:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

This is the secret (the mystery) that prevails in believers, which enables them to live acceptably to God, rejoicing in His blessing. We can describe this to each other, but we must be careful to avoid ascribing such blessing to each other just because God does it. We must be careful to remember the power to live in self denial is the grace operative in us because of "Christ in you."

The basis of such blessed living is the Gospel. It is because Christ died for me to take away my sins, and to share with me His righteousness, and because I yielded myself to Him by faith that I can "reckon myself indeed to be dead . . . and alive unto God." In actual practice I forego any further interest in any human situation, as I pursue my personal fellowship with the living Lord. It seems to me that at a time like this, it is hard for us to take these truths which are invisible (they are secret truths) and to bring

them into our daily life. To be able to have this actually before us in the day's work and so far as we are concerned from morning till night, to live in the general frame of mind and attitude where we have no personal interest in anything at all that comes to our hand, we can see it and we could have personal interest, but we basically deny ourselves and reckon ourselves indeed to be dead and alive unto God.

It is not a simple process but it is glorious. You can do it, anybody can do it. All you need to do is to be humble enough and meek enough to yield yourself under the mighty hand of God and accept God's plan for you. If I wanted to be saved, I need to give myself over to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will save me. Almighty God will save me but He is going to have all of me. I often think in that connection it is a good deal like getting into an elevator to go up to the sixth floor. The elevator is down on the first floor and you are right in front of it and you know as well as I do you have to get into the elevator, and I mean "all into the elevator," because they have to shut the door before it will move. There is something very significant about that. That is about like it is in spiritual living. You need to come into the Lord Jesus Christ, put your trust in Him, and be altogether in Him and then it will work. And this can be done if you are humble enough. Sometimes it takes suffering, sometimes it takes calamity, and sometimes it takes just an understanding of the Scriptures, for you to be humble enough and willing enough to yield yourself to God entirely.

It is most important that I recognize that such "peace" is not my personal achievement. "Peace with God" is the result of what Christ did on Calvary, and of my personal acceptance of Him. Nothing and nobody can rob me of this precious treasure! To "live in peace" is the aim and purpose of every believer. But this is not always possible.

Paul wrote "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). The fact is that it does not all "lie in you"! In every situation which develops among men some of the whole deal lies in the other person, or in others. Abel was a righteous person but his brother Cain killed him. The Lord Jesus lived a perfect life, never once doing any selfish act, yet He was killed by the very persons He came to help.

The Scriptures speak of "the way of peace" as being a mode of living in faith that leads the believer into the blessing of God. There is something we have to do about it. We have a relationship with God to maintain, and there is an obedience involved in the matter. We do not receive peace as a reward but we receive peace as it were as a goal; it is something we move toward as you and I commit ourselves to God and walk with Him, giving ourselves over to Him, yielding everything into God's hands. Someone may say "You have to have something, you have to live." Yes. You have to live, and I want to tell you one thing, God will see to it that you have what is necessary. When you yield everything over to God, that doesn't mean you do not have anything. It means you have what God gives you, that is how you can do it. You can trust yourself entirely to God, because God will in His own way bless you. Sometimes the blessing that He brings to you is in the form of favorable circumstances, and benefits that are beyond anything you could have earned, beyond anything you could have done.

Every now and again the believer has this blessed experience of yielding himself over to God, feeling he has lost everything; and turns around to find that he has more, he is richer now than he ever would have been before. This is true because if anybody yields himself over to God and gives everything over to God, God will supply to him everything that he needs. The Scriptures speak of the way of peace as being a mode of living in faith that leads the believer into the blessing of God. And may we all, each one of us, by the grace of God share in this peace of God which passeth all understanding.

## **Chapter 12**

## Peace Is From God

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters,  
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (Psalm 23).

Perhaps the world's greatest description of peace in this world is the 23rd Psalm. In this figure of speech the Shepherd is God, the sheep are the people of God, the believers. This picture in the Old Testament is a prophecy of what Christ Jesus will do for His own. It may be noted at once that the sheep do not achieve this rest, it is given to them. The Shepherd does all that is done to secure the blessing of security and peace.

Because "The Lord is my Shepherd" I shall not lack anything I need. "He maketh me to lie down . . ." Sheep are easily disturbed and frightened. When they are uneasy or alarmed they cannot lie down to rest. They stir around in confusion and fear. It is only when all possible enemies are removed that the sheep will lie down to rest. Even so with the believer in Christ living in this world there are forces, elements, persons even Satan who "goeth about as a lion, seeking whom he may devour." As the soul becomes aware of such danger there is disquiet, uneasiness, trouble. It is when the Gospel is believed: when the believer is aware that Christ Jesus has overcome death and Satan, that he can relax his fears, and lie down in peace.

In fellowship with Christ the believer walks in quiet; there are no storms: the waters he walks by are still. In such circumstances his faith is encouraged and strengthened: "He restoreth my soul."

And now we come to a very important truth. While it is true that Christ Jesus died for us to reconcile us to God; and God has regenerated the believer and adopted him as His child, giving him the Holy Spirit to dwell in him, it is still also true that God looks for righteousness that He may bless it. In writing to the Ephesians Paul wrote "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). In John 15:1-8 we have the words of Jesus of Nazareth in which He shows the relationship believers have with Him which results in the fruit of good works to the glory of God.

In His sovereign providence God overrules all the situations the believer will encounter. In any situation there are always divers options challenging the believer to choose how he will do. It is the work of his Lord, the Shepherd, to lead the believer by the Holy Spirit within him to choose the option which will be righteous in the sight of God. God is especially interested to have the believer be righteous because he belongs to Christ, the Son of God; and the righteousness that appears in the life of the believer is to the glory of the name of Christ.

The remainder of this Psalm describes further aspects of the blessing the sheep enjoys because of the Good Shepherd. It is always helpful to remember that this entire confidence in the provision of peace and safety is based upon what God will do for the believer through His Son, Jesus Christ, by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the regenerated soul. What was so beautifully described in Psalm 23 is a prophecy of what Christ Jesus will do for the believer who trusts in Him. Just as "salvation is from

God," God does it, even so "peace is from God."

At this point I feel it is important to warn against a common error. Because we believe God is gracious, and that God cares for all men (John 3:16) it is so easy to fall into the snare of thinking that it is the will of God that all men should have peace. In one sense that is true, but that is when there is repentance and faith in Christ's death on the cross for sin. It is to be feared there is widespread failure to warn souls that God "will not always strive with man." The Apostle Paul reminded the Colossians of his own procedure "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:28).

The Scriptures are very plain and clear as to the prospect of peace from God in this world. There are two well-known passages in Isaiah that deal with this problem. "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). And then again "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:20-21). Since evil is rampant in this world peace on earth is impossible. It is to be feared that some may be tempted to think this revelation belongs in the Old Testament. But this is not the case.

This error in interpretation is encouraged at Christmas time by our hearing the greeting of the angels at the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Luke 2:14 is translated in the King James Version ". . . on earth peace, good will toward men." Apparently this is not a good translation. In the Layman's Parallel New Testament we find three other versions. ". . . on earth peace among men with whom He is well-pleased men of good will in His favor"; ". . . and peace on earth for all those who please Him"; ". . . on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

But we have an even stronger revelation in the words of Jesus of Nazareth Himself. In Matthew 10:34-39 are the startling words "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. . . ." It is true that during His ministry he said "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). And this points us directly to Him. Peace is possible, while we are in this world, but only when we come to Him in faith.

That there never was any hope of peace among nations in this world seems obviously implied in the teaching of Jesus Christ. "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass" (Matthew 24:6).

We all remember with thanksgiving the promise revealed by the prophets that when Messiah comes to set up the Kingdom of God that "swords will be made into plowshares, and spears into pruning-hooks" and that "nations will not learn war anymore." (Micah 4:3). That prospect awaits the return of the Lord.

In the meantime we who believe in Christ can cherish His words: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).